



## Eureka Police Department

604 C Street  
Eureka, California 95501-0341  
(707) 441-4060 phone – (707) 441-4334 fax  
[www.ci.eureka.ca.gov](http://www.ci.eureka.ca.gov)

# A Guide to Shoplifting Prevention and Education

**"Train your employees to be courteous and alert. A thief who thinks that he or she is being watched is less likely to steal. Take steps to prevent shoplifting. It's easier and safer to prevent shoplifting than it is to deal with a shoplifter. Know the signs of shoplifting".**

Crime Prevention experts generally agree that the best deterrent to shoplifting is an alert, well trained sales staff which pays careful attention to the needs of the customers.

Most shoplifters are amateurs who steal impulsively when opportunities arise. Shoplifters come from all socioeconomic, ethnic, racial, sex and age categories. They shy away from any situation where they get a lot of attention. Every store should have a definite policy regarding shoplifters. All employees should be thoroughly acquainted with the policy.

The following guidelines are designed to help store managers create policies, procedures, and physical deterrents to minimize the chances of shoplifting losses.

### **Store Policy:**

Establish a store policy that SHOPLIFTERS WILL be prosecuted. Yes, your employee will have to spend some time in court, but after a few incidents and establishing a reputation for prosecuting, the problem will lessen.



## Educate Your Staff:

Once you have set your store policy, it is important to educate your staff on what you expect. A well-trained and alert staff forms the basis for good crime prevention. Don't rely on Technology instead of investing in proper staff training. Training need not be expensive - 15 minutes each week should be enough to refresh your staff's memories to stay alert.

## Know the signs of shoplifting and watch for someone who:

- Seems nervous
- Avoids eye contact
- Wanders around the store without buying anything
- Leaves the store and returns to your business repeatedly in a short period of time
- Stays in an area of your business where he or she is hard to see
- Keeps watching you or is constantly looking around
- Avoids the attention of employees
- Wears baggy clothes or heavy outer garments out of season



- Enter the store carrying bundles, bags, boxes, briefcases, top coats, umbrellas, oversized packages, musical instruments, or books to conceal merchandise. Post signs that require every customer to check packages at the door or with a checker before they shop. Seal packages which are sold so that they cannot be used to conceal other items



- Try to divert the clerk's attention. Shoplifters sometimes ask for more articles than the clerk can control, disrupt a display or simply engage a clerk in conversation while an accomplice does the thieving



**Shoplifting techniques are as varied as the imagination. Train employees to be alert and to watch for signs that could indicate a shoplifter**

#### Store set up techniques and protocols:

The following tips can greatly help in deterring shoplifters and assist staff in more rapidly recognizing shoplifters in the process of stealing from your business.

- Increase visibility in and out of your store. Limit advertising posters, move them lower on the glass so passersby can see activity inside, employees can see people approaching and leaving the store.



- Display merchandise so that employees can easily watch the movement of customers. Avoid narrow, cluttered aisles and maintain an open, neat appearance throughout the store. Avoid long, unbroken aisles and leave space between display cases. Keep displays at a medium height so that



employees can see across the top of them. Arrange items neatly so that anything missing can be quickly noticed. Make sure the entire store is well lit.



- Place the cash register(s) away from doors, but in clear view from the outside. Raise the floor behind the register so staff can better survey the store. The cashier should have an unobstructed view of the store.
- Establish clear cash register procedures. The register should be open only while it is actually being used. The cash drawer should be closed before merchandise is packaged. Cashiers should be alerted to avoid distractions from other customers while helping someone at the cash register. Keep cash registers locked and remove the key when they are not in use.
- At checkout counters, look inside items such as trash cans, ice chests, tool boxes, shoe boxes, and purses for concealed merchandise.
- Cashiers should always double check the price of any item which seems to be inaccurately marked.
- Give customers receipts for all purchases. **Do not** make refunds without requiring a sales receipt and keep the store clear of discarded sales receipts.



- Encourage employees to circulate throughout their sections and to serve all customers as promptly as possible. If a customer enters the store while another is being helped, the newcomer's presence should be acknowledged with the words, "I'll be right with you."
- Develop a warning system for alerting employees that a shoplifter is suspected and control entry and exit at the store.
- Remove empty hangers from clothing racks after articles of clothing have been purchased. Require customers to check articles of clothing when entering and leaving fitting rooms. Post signs indicating the maximum number of clothing articles allowed in a dressing room at one time. Many stores have found three items to be the maximum controllable limit.



## Security Equipment

Optical, mechanical, and electronic devices can be used against shoplifters. Convex mirrors should be placed so that several areas of the store can be seen in one glance.



CCTV cameras will deter some thieves, and can help with prosecutions if good quality equipment is used. Cameras should be highly visible, e.g. monitors may be mounted at entrances, and signs displayed alerting potential thieves to the use of CCTV. *Dummy cameras can provide an inexpensive short term deterrent on their own, or increase the apparent cover and hence deterrent value of a live system. But do not rely solely on dummy cameras. Thieves will soon find it out.*



RFID tags can be tagged to each of the inventory capturing rack-space. If someone tries to take out this products with RF tags tagged to it, sensors will find it and it will beep.



*Most strategies work best in combination rather than isolation, e.g. CCTV can work effectively, particularly where helped by security mirrors, good lighting, and alert well-trained staff. Store design is important.*

### **Staff preparation for dealing with the shoplifter:**

Your staff needs to know what you expect of them once a suspect is identified. At times making suspects aware that they have been noticed will often be enough to deter crime. By using the normal sales approach e.g. 'can I help you in any way?' or 'can I help you find anything?' will be enough, or by staff making themselves busy near the suspect. This can be achieved by walking past them, smiling at them, and by looking them in the eye.

However, If the theft has already occurred, do you want your staff to keep the suspect merely under observation, do you want them to alert specialist security staff (if you employ them), or do you want them to attempt to detain the customer when he/she exits the store. Staff knowing the answers to these questions ahead of time will allow whichever policy you enact to take place efficiently and safely.

You need to instill in your staff to remember to follow their instincts. They shouldn't continue to confront a shoplifter if they start to feel frightened or uneasy. They should get help when it's safe to do so, by calling the police. Their personal safety is always most important.

### **Information to gather in preparation to call the police:**

How many suspects were there?

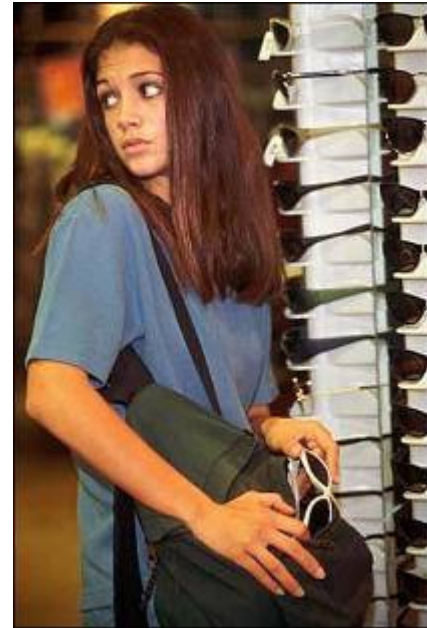
The suspect's physical description (gender, age, height, weight, hair color, facial hair, etc)

What they were wearing (colors, types, and if the clothing had any distinctive logos or markings)

What was taken (item description and value?)

What direction they left

If they got into vehicle, the vehicle's description (including license plate number)



### Store Banning:

A final suggestion of recourses available to you in deterring shoplifting is store banning. Your shop is private property, just like your home. Although there is an implied invitation to come in and shop, you are fully entitled to exclude any person from your shop if you feel that their presence is unhelpful to your business - e.g. drunks, or someone whom you have previously caught stealing, or suspected of stealing.

You do not have to give any reason for banning someone. Just politely tell them that you would rather they did not shop here any more, and that you would appreciate it if they do not come into your store again. If they return they will be trespassing, and you can order them to leave. If they refuse, you are entitled to call the police to assist you in removing them. However, make sure your shop has posted a sign(s) declaring your "Right to refuse service".







